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# Prosecutor: 2-year-old boy killed after gang leader gives order to shoot: 'Bust, bust, bust'

By MEGAN CREPEAU , ANNA SPOERRE and JEREMY GORNER  
CHICAGO TRIBUNE | OCT 23, 2018



Two-year-old Julien Gonzalez left the birthday party and walked through the backyard, apparently following his father toward a fight that was getting louder in the alley.

As he approached the gate, someone yelled out, "Bust, bust, bust," an order to a fellow gang member to open fire. The little boy stepped into the alley and was almost immediately scooped up by an older teen running for cover.

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But they were both caught by the red light of a laser sight before they could reach the gate. At least 10 shots rang out. The 18-year-old was hit in the back and the leg, and Julien was shot once in the neck. The teen survived, Julien did not.



Alexander Varela, 27, is charged in the death of 2-year-old Julien Gonzalez. (Chicago Police Department)

On Monday, prosecutors laid out the tragic chain of events from Oct. 6 as Alexander Varela, the man accused of giving those orders, appeared in

court on charges of murder, attempted murder and aggravated battery. Police said they are still searching for the gunman and others.

Varela, a gang leader with a criminal record stretching back at last nine years, had been upset that a fight broke out during a birthday party on the block where he lives, according to prosecutors and police.

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"He's a gang member and he thinks he owns the block," Deputy Chief of Detectives Brendan Deenihan said at a news conference announcing the charges. "So he's going to come down there and insert himself into the argument. Like, 'I don't want you arguing on my block. This is my territory.' "

Following Varela's orders, a gang member fired down the alley in the 2200 block of North Kilbourn Avenue in the Hermosa neighborhood as "a little 2-year-old (was) walking into the alley, trying to follow his father, just like any other 2-year-old would do," Deenihan said.

Julien died about an hour later at Stroger Hospital. The boy lived in the Clearing neighborhood on the South Side and is the youngest person to die by gunfire in Chicago this year.

"This is a reprehensible example of the culture that we need to change," Deenihan said. "We have civil disputes that are constantly being settled by pulling the trigger."

Shortly before the shooting, two women at the party had gotten involved in a "petty argument" that quickly escalated into a fight, Deenihan said. Varela walked up and asked why they were fighting on his block.

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People from the party came out into the alley and began fighting with Varela and other members of his Maniac Latin Disciples gang. Police have said members of another gang, the Young Latin Organization Disciples, were apparently at the party.

"Varela yelled out to his fellow gang members, 'Bust, bust, bust,' which is an order for the armed gang member to fire his gun," according to Assistant State's Attorney Jamie Santini. "Witnesses began to run and take cover. Seconds after making the command to shoot ... gunshots were fired from a single gun that had an attached laser sight that was shining a red laser light."

Responding officers found 10 9-mm shell casings from the same gun at the scene.

In the hours after the shooting, Varela was stopped by police while he sat in a truck at Kostner and Fullerton avenues, according to a police report. The officers were following a tip that a vehicle involved in a shooting was behind a gas station at Kostner and Fullerton.

They found Varela behind the wheel of the truck, the report said. "Based on the nature of the call and a double shooting, one victim dying as a result of a gunshot wound earlier ... (officers) ordered all occupants out of the vehicle," the report stated.

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A knife was found near the driver's seat, and Varela was charged with unlawful use of a weapon and released from custody the next day, records show.

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Varela was arrested for the shooting weeks later, on Friday, at 2344 W. Chicago Ave., after he was identified by witnesses, police said. He is being held without bail in Cook County Jail.

Varela has an arrest record that goes back to at least 2009. The majority of his cases involved minor charges like obstruction of traffic, reckless conduct and drinking on the public way, and most of his cases were quickly dismissed.

He pleaded guilty to domestic battery in 2015 and got 12 months of probation. He also has convictions for endangering the life of a child, reckless conduct and driving on a suspended license.

Varela's attorney, Assistant Public Defender Julie Koehler, said in court that he lives with his grandmother and has been steadily employed, most recently for the past few years as a dispatcher for a local towing company. He did not finish high school but has his GED, she said, and she noted that Varela has no felony convictions.

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